Transfer of POK to Pakistan

480. SHRI SATISH PRADHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the reported statement made by Mr. Farooq Abdullah, Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir regarding transfer of Pak Occupied Kashmir (POK) to Pakistan;

(b) if so, the reaction of Government thereto; and

(c) the details of action taken in this regard and the official stand thereon?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The entire State of Jammu & Kashmir is an integral part of the Indian Union. The issue which remains to be resolved is the vacation of that territory of the State of J&K which is under Pakistan's illegal and forcible occupation. India is committed to the resolution of all India-Pakistan issues in accordance with the Simla Agreement.

Recruitment of Handicapped Children to beg in Mecca and Medina

481. SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA:
SHRI JALALUDIN ANSARI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the alleged racket involving recruiting of handicapped children from certain parts of our country to beg in Mecca and Medina;

(b) if so, whether any inquiry has been conducted into this practice; and

(c) if so, the details and action taken to bring back such children and stop the practice which defame the image of the country?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) Yes, Sir, 130 children, most of them handicapped, were apprehended by the authorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia while begging in Jeddah and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The Saudi authorities did this as a part of an exercise to apprehend beggars, irrespective of their nationality during the month of Ramadan. These children were, subsequently, deported to India by the Saudi authorities;

(b) The Government of West Bengal has set up an investigation team under Criminal Investigation Department, West Bengal to conduct a detailed inquiry into the operation of these gangs.

(c) On being informed by Saudi authorities of the detention of children, the Consulate General of India issued necessary travel documents for their return to India. The deportation was done in two batches i.e. 77 children on January 13, 1997 (consisting of 76 girls and 1 boy) and 47 boys on February 3, 1997 making it a total of 124. Another 6 children, similarly apprehended, are awaiting deportation from Saudi Arabia.

The Government, while keeping in mind that inconvenience should not be caused to bonafide pilgrims going to Saudi Arabia for Haj or Umrah, has requested immigration authorities not to allow handicapped children to travel for pilgrimage unless accompanied by a parent. Separately, instructions have been issued to tighten procedures and adopt stricter measures to ensure that children travelling abroad are indeed accompanying their parents and not being taken by anyone else.

British Labour Party Statement on Kashmir

482. SHRI N. GIRI PRASAD:
SHRI JALALUDIN AN SARI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the reported statement of British Labour Party in favour of plebiscite in Kashmir; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) and (b) No such statement has been made by the British Labour Party.

Pakistan Premier's offer to hold Talks with India

483. SHRI RAM DAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Prime Minister of India responded positively to Pakistan Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif's offer to hold talks between the two governments and suggested meeting first at the Foreign Ministers' level for normalising relations and to sort out outstanding issues; and

(b) if so, the progress in this regard made so far indicating at which level and when the talks are likely to be held?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) and (b) Prime Minister has, in this letter of felicitations to the new Prime Minister of Pakistan, proposed an early resumption of a wide ranging comprehensive bilateral dialogue at an appropriate level on all issues of mutual concern. Prime Minister has conveyed that there are a number of opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation and that we approach these in a positive and constructive spirit.

Indo-British Joint Collaboration

484. SHRIMATI JAYANTI PATNAIK: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken steps to establish joint collaboration between India and United Kingdom;

(b) whether some pacts haved been recently signed between the two countries;

(c) if so, the areas in which the collaborations been made; and

(d) the details of the pacts made in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) An Indo-British Partnership, earlier known as the Indo-British Partnership Initiative, has been in existence from 1993 to promote closer economic cooperation, particularly between the private sectors.

(b) During the partnership Summit organised in January in Calcutta by the confederation of Indian Industries, several agreements were signed between Indian companies and their British counterparts; these were not agreements between the countries or Governments.

(c) An inter-Governmental MOU has been signed with the UK in January on "Cooperation in coal-related industries".

(d) The MOU establishes an Indo-British Coal Forum, which would be a partnership between the coal related industries of the United Kingdom and India; it wouldd be supported by the Governments and provide a link between them and industry. Several cooperative activities have been identified under the MOU.

America's Kashmir Policy

485. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the recent statement of the U.S. Asstt. Secretary of State Ms. Robin Raphel that the elections in Jammu & Kashmir have not resolved the issue and that Kashmir remains a disputed territory for the US policy on Kashmir; and

(b) if so, whether the statement reflects US policy on Kashmir; and

(c) if so, the reaction of Government with regard thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) and (b) Government has been press items